CIO Information in the News

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INSIDE

ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE

By: Leslie Borsuk, OI&T, Office of Policy and Program Assistance

VA CIOs decided at a meeting on January 5, 2001 that VA needed to aggressively accelerate its ongoing effort to create an overarching Enterprise Architecture (EA) for the Department. An Enterprise Architecture is the explicit description and documentation of the current and desired relationships among business and management processes and information technology. The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 requires each agency to have an EA. In addition, the revision of OMB Circular A-130 closely ties an agency's capital planning and investment control process to its Enterprise Architecture and its transition from current architecture to target architecture. Although VA's Administrations have an EA or are developing one, VA does not have an architecture that provides a high level view of VA's interdepartmental business processes, information flows and relationships, applications processing, and data description layers.

An EA Steering Committee, composed of data architects from each of the Administrations quickly put together a project plan that would build on existing architecture to develop a VA EA by March 2. The project plan follows the outline of the document and has a specific person responsible for each section. In addition to the Steering Committee, the Enterprise Architecture Workgroup was established with representatives from each of the Administrations and Staff Offices. The Workgroup members provide information for the EA, act as liaisons between the group and their offices, and approve the sections of the document as they are developed. It is especially important that representatives of VA's various business entities be involved to ensure that the information technologies proposed in the resulting EA meet their needs. The Workgroup is meeting weekly through March 1.

One section of an EA, the Technical Reference Model (TRM) and Standards Profile, had already been developed by VA and issued in May, 1999. The TRM identifies and describes the information services (such as database, communications, Intranet, etc.) used throughout the Department. The Standards Profile defines the set of IT standards that support the services articulated in

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THE CIO SCENE

The CIO Scene column for this issue introduces Gary Christopherson, Chief Information Officer, Veterans Health Administration

In July 2000 the Under Secretary for Health appointed Gary A. Christopherson to the position of Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) at the Department of Veterans Affairs. In the seven months since his arrival he has developed a health information strategy in collaboration with Department, field and headquarters leadership. This strategy will move VHA toward "ideal" health information systems that will support the "ideal" veterans health system. Health information requirements are increasing, especially the need for clinical information being securely available anywhere, anytime, to any authorized health care provider and in real time.

The information strategy was developed for both VA and VHA needs and future budget projections to support the strategy have been prepared. Working with the Office of Information and Technology, a capital investment strategy has been developed to ensure approval for these major projects to proceed.

The health information strategy is built around five major systems and integrates five cross-cutting issues. The major systems or program/business needs are registration/enrollment/eligibility, health data, health care providers, management/financial, and information/education (electronic communications and transactions). The cross cutting issues are security/ privacy, data quality, information technology architecture, infrastructure and leadership/ management. Some of these are both VHA and One VA efforts while others are solely health related.

The VHA Office of Information is responsible for providing the best appropriate information systems to enable VHA to meet veterans' health needs while also supporting the Department level initiatives, such as enterprise security and architecture for all VA information systems. The new initiatives must be adaptable, patient health centered, accessible, interoperable, connected, secure, maintainable, and standards based.

New AAC Director and Associate Director Announced

By: Lauren Kubacki, OI&T, AAC

Effective November 5, 2000, Ms. Linda L. Voges was named Director, Austin Automation Center (AAC). Regarding her new position, Ms. Voges commented, "I'm thrilled with the opportunity to lead the Center during these exciting times of e-government and rapid technological advances. We are dedicated to providing our customers with exceptional, leading- edge information technology support." Ms. Voges most recently held the AAC positions of Acting Director and Associate Director for IRM Services.

The AAC's new Associate Director for IRM Services is Mr. Samuel R. Georgeson. Mr. Georgeson brings a wealth of information technology (IT) experience to the Associate Director position. Most recently the AAC's Chief, Enterprise Systems Division, he has broad experience throughout VA Administrations and headquarters Staff Offices.

Capital Asset Management System (CAMS)

By: Mary Bracey & Mike Condon, OI&T, Office of Policy and Program Assistance

In recent years, Congress passed legislation that mandated changes to operational and management practices in government to improve performance. Legislation such as Clinger-Cohen Act, Government Paperwork Reduction Act (GPRA), and others introduced requirements and guidance on how federal agencies plan, acquire and manage information technology (IT) and other capital resources.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is spearheading a trend in government by being the first to bring all capital assets under one automated management system. The Capital Asset Management System (CAMS) initiative will integrate the Information Technology Investment Portfolio System (I-TIPS) with commercial-off-the shelf (COTS) products and develop necessary interfaces with existing financial and logistic systems to enable VA decision-makers to make more informed choices regarding capital investments.

At VA, the first step toward meeting mandated requirements is the submission of a proposal for the development of the Capital Asset Management System (CAMS) to the VA Capital Investment Board (CIB) for approval. The CAMS application has been reviewed by the CIO investment panel, approved by the CIO Council, and is undergoing review by the VA Capital Investment Board (CIB). CAMS will be a suite of planning and decision-making tools that will enable managers at all levels throughout the Department including Central Office and field facilities to plan, analyze, and track budget life-cycle dollars applied to all capital assets.

By developing an automated system, CAMS will enable managers to better meet the goals and objectives in strategic plans by providing accurate and current information about each capital investment throughout the life cycle. The current tool for managing technology investments, the Information Technology Investment Portfolio System (I-TIPS), is a web-based information and decision support system, and will be a major component of CAMS. Once funding is approved, I-TIPS will be made available Department-wide throughout the remainder of FY01. The features in I-TIPS will be enhanced and expanded during the remainder of the planning period as part of the CAMS initiative.

During the Select, Control and Evaluate phases of the Capital Investment process, CAMS will capture investment abstracts, investment data, and facilitate tracking status as well as updating original data. With Expert Choice, the VA's decision support tool, linked to the I-TIPS database, investment proposals will be scored and ranked based on criteria established for the technical and strategic review phases.

CAMS will enable VA decision-makers to make more informed choices regarding capital investment. This type of information allows VA to continually improve the capital investment process and better select effective capital investments and more efficiently allocate VA funds.

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the TRM. This section is being updated to reflect new technology, standards, and legislation, such as accessibility mandated by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Once the first version of our EA is complete, VA will immediately begin working to enhance the document and set up a process for managing and maintaining it. The EA will be an evolutionary document which will need to be updated on a regular basis to reflect new missions and business processes, new technology, and architectures that have been established.

Section 508

By: Rosetta Screven and Ernesto Castro, OI&T

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act and strengthened provisions covering access to Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT), for people with disabilities. Section 508 (29 U.S.C.Sec.794) of the Act requires that when Federal agencies develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology, they must ensure that it is accessible to people with disabilities, unless it would pose an undue burden to do so.

Federal employees and members of the public who have disabilities must have access to and use of information and services that is comparable to the access and use available to non-disabled Federal employees and members of the public. In addition, former President Clinton issued an Executive Memorandum to all Federal agencies asking that Federal agencies make all programs offered on their Internet and Intranet sites accessible to people with disabilities by July 27, 2001, consistent with the requirements of the Act.

Section 508 directed the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) to develop access standards that will become part of the Federal acquisition procurement regulations. Section 508 uses the procurement process to ensure technology acquired by the Federal government is accessible. The intent of the standards is to clarify the Federal market's requirement to industry for accessible products intended for general use. By statute, the enforcement provision applies only to electronic and information technology procured on or after the effective date – June 21, 2001. Section 508 standards will be incorporated into the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). An agency's procurement of accessible technology will be subject to the same stringent compliance and enforcement mechanisms as other parts of the FAR.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in electronic and information technology, and will allow new opportunities to become available for Federal employees and individuals with disabilities. The VA CIO Council has established a Department-wide Section 508 Advisory Committee, with representation from Veterans Health Administration; Veterans Benefits Administration; National Cemetery Administration; and various Staff Offices to meet the requirements of Section 508.

Six subcommittees established from the "Core" Committee are identifying and providing recommendations on IT Web accessibility; human resources; procurement and budget initiatives; legal and alternative dispute resolution; training and awareness; computer technology and telecommunication/multi-media issues. As accessibility issues in compliance with 508 continue to evolve, the committee will define areas for improvement, and make recommendations to ensure VA's budget and procurement processes have provisions, which include adequate funding in support of reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.

Highlights Of Section 508

All Information Technology Procurements - On December 21, 2000, the compliance clock started ticking when the Access Board published standards to ensure that electronic and information technology procured by the Federal government is accessible to employees with disabilities. All information technology procurements over $2,500, made on or after June 21, 2001, including but not limited to telecommunication equipment, information kiosks, must meet the Access Boards Technical Standards, unless it imposes an undue burden to do so. The standards exempt "back office" equipment used only by service personnel for maintenance, repair or similar purposes. National Security Systems involving military forces or equipment that is an integral part of a weapon is also exempt from Section 508 requirements.

FAR Rule - The Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council has six months or until June 21, 2001 to incorporate the standards in the Federal Acquisition Regulations. The proposed FAR Rule was published for public comment on January 22, 2001. The proposed

rule incorporates the Access Board standards. A copy of the standards may be obtained at http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/508standards.htm. It is imperative that Federal agencies ensure internal procurement policies and procedures are revised to reflect needed changes.

Section 508 Enforcement Provision - There is an administrative complaint process that became effective six months after the Board issued its final standards. It enables any individual with a disability to file a complaint alleging that a Federal department or agency has not complied with the accessible technology standards in a procurement made after that date. There are no enforcement provisions of Section 508 outside of procurement.

Although GSA is conducting training on Web Accessibility, and Procurement Training and Awareness, VA is on the leading edge and has designed and arranged internal training for VA personnel only to assist in implementing Section 508 within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The NARA CIPS application runs on the AAC's S/390 under Customer Information Control System (CICS). Until now, this application has only been accessible through dial-in modem or direct network connection. Customers without dial-in modems called, faxed, or mailed written requests for records to NARA. The new CIPS web-enabled application allows any authorized NARA customers throughout the world to request records on the Internet.

The security logon technique developed is reusable for access validation on any AAC-hosted Web application. Security access is established through current user registration methods in the Automated Customer Registration System (ACRS). Customers have one user ID and password for access to all Web and mainframe applications.

The Web is protected with 128-bit encryption via digital certificates. To build the Web-enabled application, the AAC partnered with Catapult Technologies and ResQ Net technicians. The AAC also contracted with Computer Associates to develop a Unicenter, the Next Generation (TNG)/Top Secret logon screen for user verification.

AAC Launches Accessible Application Web Page for Customer

by: Judy Brown, OI&T, AAC

The Austin Automation Center (AAC) web enabled the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Centers Information Processing System (CIPS). The CIPS Web application allows NARA customers who have Internet access to request records via the Internet, thereby eliminating the requirement to dial into the AAC for access, making the application accessible to more NARA customers. The AAC can use this same web-enabling technology to give any online mainframe application a graphical user interface (GUI) look and feel. Applications can be tailored to be more intuitive to use and to have more efficient navigation than traditional mainframe applications.

PCHS Contractor Donates To BVA Field Service Program

By: Sandi Hughes, OI&T, Office of Policy and Program Assistance

The Blinded Veteran's Association received eight new Compaq Deskpro EN Series Minitower computers as a donated gift from the Compaq Computer Corporation during a brief presentation November 6th at the company's Greenbelt, Maryland facility. The Blinded Veteran's Association Executive Director, Mr. Tom Miller and Field Service National Program Director, Mr. George Brummell, accompanied by other headquarters staff, accepted the gift.

Compaq Computer Corporation is a contractor for the VA's Procurement of Computer Hardware and Software Contract (PCHS) V101(93)P-1599.

Mr. Brummell said the gift is a milestone in assisting blinded veterans throughout the country by directly linking BVA's field service offices to the benefits and care to which they are entitled through VA. Compaq's relationship with VA, he said, has allowed the company to set BVA's configuration in the new computer hardware and software consistent with the VA Local Area Network.

"We will now have the capacity to adapt and remain compatible with future VA changes and upgrades for at least the next 7-9 years," he affirmed. The computer package consists of Intel Pentium III CPU, memory expandable to 512 megabytes, external desktop speakers, and 21-inch color monitors.

Complementing the Compaq gift is a similar donation of eight printers and JAWS software for the blind by Federal Data Corporation. MILVETS Systems Technology, Inc. will furnish system enhancements to ensure accessibility requirements are met for all current and prospective employees and veterans with disabilities.

The Blinded Veteran's Association's Field Service Representatives in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Denver, Chicago, Decatur (Georgia), Boston, and Washington, DC will all utilize new equipment provided by both corporations. The Blinded Veteran's Association National Headquarters in Washington, DC will also use one of the computer packages and printers.

The ceremony also featured the presentation of a framed letter from Compaq's VA National Programs Manager, Mr. Robert E. Williams to Mr. Tom Miller. The letter praised the Blinded Veteran's Association for its long history of assisting blinded veterans and the corporation's commitment to supporting the effort.

"Compaq Computer Corporation takes great pride in providing the Blinded Veteran's Association with Compaq Deskpro EN Computer Systems and displays for use by their field offices," the letter stated. "Our nation's veterans should never be forgotten for their dedicated service and sacrifice, and it is our social responsibility to provide them with the best benefits, services, and support available."

New Narrowband Frequency Requirements

By: Tyrone Dorsey and Joanne Brinser, VHA

The Department of Commerce, which has oversight authority of government-wide frequency allocations, has directed that all federal government radio frequencies convert from existing wideband to narrowband operations. These new technological developments will permit effective communications, allowing reduced channel spacing of 12.5 kilo-Hertz (kHz) as opposed to existing 25.0 kHz, which will permit additional users to be accommodated within the radio frequency (RF) spectrum.

Frequency bands affected for VA narrowband operations are very high frequency (VHF) 162-174 mega Hertz (mHz) and ultra high frequency (UHF) 406.1-420 mHz. The deadlines for each conversion are December 31, 2004 for VHF band and December 31, 2007 for UHF band.

The new narrowband standards that can be found on the Internet at www.ntia.doc.gov/osmhome/redbook/redbook.html under Chapter 5-Spectrum Standards, paragraph Section 5.3.5.2. All VA facilities operating two-way radio systems consisting of radio base stations, hand held units, pagers, and vehicle radio equipment are affected. VA facilities are responsible for obtaining any necessary funding for new equipment purchases or modifications to comply. No new radio equipment can be purchased without a new narrowband RF authorization obtained from VACO Office of Telecommunications (045B2).

For additional information, contact co-phase managers Tyrone Dorsey at (202) 273-8084 or Joanne Brinser at (703) 331-5325.

Transition? What Transition?

By: Kelly Edwards , OI&T, Office of Telecommunications

When most of us hear the word transition, we think of a period of time after a presidential election when most government agencies prepare for a change in administrations and a change in key leadership positions. For many of us here in VA, the term evokes a completely different meaning when applied to Information Technology (IT), especially for those who were actively involved over the last several years planning the transition of our long distance services. No big deal right? It's only telephone service.

After all, we have become spoiled haven't we? We have come to expect and depend on the reliability of telecommunications services. It's unlikely any of us remember when we last picked up a telephone and failed to hear that familiar dial tone. But when we think of transitioning services these days, it takes on a much broader meaning than simply telephone service. Besides basic voice, we now consider the impact of switched and dedicated toll free, televideo, satellite, internet, point-to-point, and multiple data services.

For more than two years VA has planned the transition from the FTS2000 contract network to the new FTS2001 services contract. The older network allowed use of a unique seven-digit private dialing plan. After much debate by transition teams, VA customers opted for a ten-digit dial plan under the new FTS2001 contract. From the two FTS2001 vendors, Sprint was selected as VA's vendor of choice. Transition start was delayed several times. Although the teams wanted a non-disruptive, subtle transition, VA dependence on private numbering and interoperability during transition was a growing concern.

VA transition was deliberate and meticulous. Partnering with customer program offices, the vendor, the General Services Administration (GSA) and collaborative transition teams, VA convinced GSA to provide a bridge between the old and new networks. Waiting for the bridge delayed our transition but provided the groundwork for a VA transition strategy. The bridge provided VA interoperability among sites on different networks allowing transition to proceed at VA's own pace. Although dedicated voice transition is now nearly complete, it is worth noting that VA did not start the execution phase of this transition until mid-August 2000.

VA seized the opportunity to migrate data services as well. The FTS2001 contract and Sprint were selected as the best choice for replacement of VA's wide area network. Sprint cooperated by providing price incentives to customers based on FTS2000 pricing until migration could occur. VA has nearly completed the migration from a private wide area data network (familiar to customers as the Integrated Data Communications Utility, IDCU) to a new high-speed ATM (asynchronous transfer mode) backbone. Migration of these data services to FTS2001 will ensure effective and economical wide area network services for years to come.

I would like to share some personal observations resulting from this huge nation-wide effort. The FTS2001 transition forced organizations to partner. It forced accomplishment of a significant amount of work with few resources in a short period of time. Of course there were technical difficulties, delays, and complaints. But those having been a part of the FTS2001 transition from the start, witnessed VA field and headquarters staff, as well as vendor staff, come together as an integrated team.

The next time you hear someone say: "Transition? What transition?" remember it could mean something other than follow-on to the presidential election or new incoming leadership. It might be in reference to the subtle, non-disruptive transition from FTS2000 to FTS2001. Not many VA-ers know the level of effort it took or the magnitude of this nationwide transition—and that's OK by us.

Austin Automation Center (AAC) Sun E10000 (E10K) Success

By: Dan McAuley, OI&T, AAC

Earlier this year the Austin Automation Center (AAC) acquired the dynamic and versatile Sun E10K enterprise-wide server. This highly successful acquisition provides significant enhanced production and development domains for AAC customers, specifically the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for their Data Warehouse (DW) and Operational Data Store (ODS) applications. The E10K improves cost efficiency by providing VBA with domains that share applications while logically isolating software, central processing unit (CPU), and input/output (I/O) generated errors.

Information technology is one of the most important tools available to meet the business needs of our customers. One of AAC's goals is to provide a scalable, flexible server environment that enables AAC customers to enjoy redundant hardware functionality and increased reliability while reaping the cost-saving benefits enjoyed by sharing infrastructure costs that are leveraged among multiple consumers. With the E10K, that goal has come to fruition.

AAC staff is continuously exploring options that will enhance productivity, timeliness, and cost effectiveness in this ever-changing environment. The AAC is committed to providing all AAC customers with the best information technology support possible as the AAC leads the way into a remarkable and exciting future.

Pilot Demonstration of IT Performance Measurement Methodology

By: Peter Flynn, OI&T, Office of Policy and Program Assistance

The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 requires federal agencies to measure the contribution of IT investments to mission results. Many agencies have had difficulty in accomplishing this. In July 2000, the IT Capital Planning Committee under the Federal Chief Information Officer's Council established the Subcommittee on IT Performance Management to address this fact. The Subcommittee, along with the General Services Administration (GSA) Office of Information Technology is sponsoring pilot programs to demonstrate measurement methodologies for IT.

The VA Information Security Program was accepted for the pilot demonstration of the Applied Information Economics (AIE) performance measurement methodology. The VA Information Security Program will secure VA's information assets from known threats and vulnerabilities. Without risk management, these threats and vulnerabilities can have serious consequences for VA as an organization, and for individual veterans who entrust VA with their most private data. Sensitive information, e.g., financial transaction data, personal information in veterans medical records and benefits payments, is vulnerable to inadvertent or deliberate misuse, fraudulent use, improper disclosure or destruction. Vulnerabilities as a result of inadequate controls and oversight include unauthorized access to VA systems, lack of systems monitoring, inadequate physical security, inadequate segregation of duties, no controls over changes to operating systems, and incomplete disaster recovery/ contingency planning development and testing.

The AIE methodology was developed by Hubbard Decision Research and includes calculating the value of information, determining a measurement process and units of measure for benefits, and identifying methods and sources to collect measurement data.

A core team of stakeholders and observers has been attending regular workshops to determine the scope of measurements to be assessed. After that the information value of identified metrics will be computed. Measurements will eventually be designed and the measurement methods will be initiated.

At the conclusion of the pilot, VA will have a report that:

•Describes and explains the AIE methodology;

•Defines the tasks or steps taken and the tools used to implement the methodology;

•Describes the IT initiative and the resources VA used to conduct the pilot;

•Includes the work products VA developed using the methodology;

•Includes guidelines for using the work products;

•Identifies and explains factors that facilitated or impeded the completion of the pilot; and

•Evaluates the applicability and usefulness of the methodology to the VA Information Security Program.

The VA IT community welcomes Secretary Anthony J. Principi and looks forward to working with him in assisting our nation's veterans.

Hy Tech's Tip

Do not open unsolicited or suspicious email messages or their attachments.

Choose a password that is not easily guessed (at least an eight-character alphanumeric combination), and protect it as you would your own personal credit card information.

CIO Information in the News is published by the Office of Information and Technology to inform the VA information technology (IT) community of projects, activities, significant accomplishments, and upcoming events. You are invited to submit contributing articles. Please send your articles electronically to *CIO Newsletter*.

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